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TAGS: PGOV, PHUM, PINR, PREL, HA
SUBJECT: PRIME MINISTER FORMS CABINET

Classified By: AMBASSADOR JAMES B. FOLEY. REASONS 1.5(B) AND (D)

1. (C) Summary. Prime Minister Latortue finalized his cabinet choices on the afternoon of March 16, following consultations with President Alexandre. The cabinet was

installed at 14:00 on March 17. Latortue chose to consolidate several existing ministries as a cost-cutting measure, naming only 13 ministers and five secretaries of state. He also opted for a non-partisan, technocratic government; while three of his cabinet choices worked previously in Lavalas administrations, none of the eighteen have strong ties to either Lavalas or the "opposition" parties. In reaction, the Convergence Democratique (CD) issued a March 17 statement protesting their "exclusion" from the "government of national unity," but acknowledged that Latortue's choices were good ones. Though President Alexandre agreed to name only one -- rather than his desired two -- ministers (the Minister of Social Affairs), Latortue told Ambassador that he sees growing problems with the President, and particularly with the latter's ambitious, potentially corrupt personal staff. End Summary.

Cabinet Choices

2. (C) The following individuals were named to Latortue's government, and will be formally sworn into office on the afternoon of March 17. Biographic information includes Post's information and, where noted, Latortue's commentary to Ambassador:

MINISTER OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS: Yvon Simeon. Former diplomat, Minister Counselor at Haitian Embassy in Paris.

MINISTER OF THE INTERIOR, LOCAL GOVERNMENT, and NATIONAL SECURITY: Herard Abraham. Former Commander in Chief of Haitian Army, Minister of Information, and Minister of Foreign Affairs.

MINISTER OF JUSTICE: Bernard Gousse. University professor and lawyer. Senior Legal Advisor to IFES Judicial Reform Sector. Former USAID justice specialist. Worked with civil society "Group of 184."

MINISTER OF FINANCE: Henri Bazin. President of Association of Haitian Economists, twenty years of UN experience, primarily with the UN Economic Commission for Africa (Addis Ababa). Brother of Marc Bazin.

MINISTER OF HEALTH: Dr. Josette Bijoux. A senior public health physician and long-term consultant to PAHO (Pan-American Health Organization). Former Southern Departmental Director of the Ministry of Health.

MINISTER OF AGRICULTURE: Philippe Mathieu, agronomist. Latortue told Ambassador that the Council of Eminent Persons had rejected his candidate and lobbied for Mathieu instead. Latortue said he did not know Mathieu personally, but that Mathieu had a "top-notch C.V."

MINISTER OF EDUCATION and CULTURE: Pierre Buteau. University professor, choice of the National Teacher's Union. Latortue

described Buteau as "widely respected," and capable of "bringing peace" to an education sector in turmoil after repeated disruptions to the school year. May lack experience in management.

MINISTER OF PLANNING, ENVIRONMENT, and EXTERIOR COOPERATION: Roland Pierre, former Vice-Governor of the Central Bank; former member of CMEP (Council for Modernization/Privatization of Public Enterprise); former Director of Industrial Development, Ministry of Finance; and independent consultant.

MINISTER OF COMMERCE, INDUSTRY, and TOURISM: Danielle St. Lot. Current CCIH (Haitian Chamber of Commerce and Industry) Executive Director; former member of Latortue's staff (Foreign Ministry, 1988) and staff member of the Ministry of Commerce and Industry (1981-88).

MINISTER OF SOCIAL AFFAIRS: Pierre Claude Calixte, lawyer. President Alexandre's choice; Latortue explained to Council of Eminent Persons that he had made this appointment solely based on the President's recommendation. Latortue told Ambassador that he is worried about this choice, but saw the necessity of placating Alexandre.

MINISTER OF PUBLIC WORKS: Jean-Paul Toussaint, a former Public Works Ministry engineer. Latortue described him as the "private sector" nominee.

MINISTER OF WOMEN'S ISSUES: Adeline Magloire Chancy, a former Minister of Literacy under Preval and a former law school classmate of Latortue's.

MINISTER WITHOUT PORTFOLIO: Robert Ulysse. Ulysse is a close friend of Latortue and will work within the Prime Minister's Office, also serving as government spokesman. Elected Senator in 1990, lived the last 5-6 years near Latortue in Boca Raton, working on a Ph.D. in international relations. A Protestant pastor.

SECRETARY OF STATE FOR FINANCE: Andre Lemerancier Georges. Long-term employee of the Ministry of Finance.

SECRETARY OF STATE FOR CULTURE: Magalie Comeau Denis. Women's rights advocate, widow of political figure (and Prime Minister nominee) and playwright, Herve Denis.

SECRETARY OF STATE FOR YOUTH, SPORTS, and CIVIC EDUCATION: Frantz Leandre. Latortue told Ambassador he had picked Leandre "against the advice of the Council." (The Council wanted Evans Lescouflair, who held this post in the Preval administration.) Latortue described Leandre as "dynamic, a man of the people," but admitted he was "taking a chance" with this choice.

SECRETARY OF STATE FOR HAITIANS LIVING ABROAD: Alix Baptiste. Previous Director General of the MFA, well-known Embassy

contact. A strong supporter of NOAH. Latortue told Ambassador he envisioned this choice as a way of building stronger relations with NOAH, which had been previously supportive of Aristide.

SECRETARY OF STATE FOR ENVIRONMENT: Yves Andre Wainright.
Agronomist, former Preval Minister of Environment.

Latortue Favors Technocrats

3. (C) Latortue told Ambassador that he had made a choice to exclude "all political parties" from the cabinet, in an effort to construct a non-partisan, hard-working, technocratic government. While three cabinet members (Wainright, Chancy, and Baptiste) had served previously in Lavalas governments, Latortue explained, they were not Lavalas partisans.

Convergence Feels Snubbed

4. (C) CD reacted to the cabinet choices on March 17, hailing the formation of a new government "of great competence and quality." However, CD members "wanted it to be known that the Prime Minister and Council of Wise Men had decided to exclude the CD in creating a government of National Union" -- despite that fact that Latortue had included members of the Lavalas regime (notably, in their eyes, Alex Baptiste. Comment: Baptiste however, though he was appointed by Aristide, is not a member of Lavalas and is apolitical. End Comment.) CD wished the government "good luck," and vowed to continue to "accompany the population" in monitoring and observing the government. CD spokesperson Micha Gaillard was careful to note, however, the CD was not "in opposition" to Latortue's government.

5. (C) Gaillard told Poloff privately that "CD's feelings had been hurt," that Latortue had not chosen one of several men the coalition had nominated for posts: Alex Larson, Henold Joseph, Jose Nicholas, or Edgard Leblanc. (Note: Latortue confirmed to Ambassador that Gerard Pierre-Charles had pressed him to accept a CD member as Minister of the Interior -- likely OPL's Leblanc. End Note.) After all CD had done to fight for Aristide's departure, Gaillard said, "after all the risks we took, suddenly we have nothing. We wanted to be present to have our know-how represented in the transition." Gaillard noted that, "in protest," the CD would not attend the March 17 installation ceremony.

Prime Minister Worried About President's Men

6. (C) Latortue told Ambassador on March 16 that he was increasingly troubled by the influence of Chief of Staff Osner Fevry on President Alexandre, as well as by signs that Alexandre might be reaching for more than his constitutional powers. He had

met with the President on March 16 to discuss his cabinet choices, Latortue told Ambassador, and things had gone smoothly until Alexandre left the room and Fevry entered. Fevry had pressed him to create a new Ministry of Religious Affairs, Latortue said, and then argued that Latortue had not given the political parties enough representation. Latortue reported to Ambassador that he had told Fevry sharply "I am here to see the President, not his staff." (In the end, Alexandre blessed the Cabinet, accepting to name only one minister rather than the two he had originally requested.)

7. (C) Latortue told Ambassador that he was already concerned about "shady dealings" in the President's cabinet, centered around Fevry. Earlier in the week, Latortue informed Ambassador that Fevry had engineered a purchase of oil for the GOH at above-market price -- implying that Fevry might have engineered a kickback. (Comment: Fevry has a dubious reputation as a lawyer, and recently served time in jail -- Latortue thinks for forging documents. End Comment.)

8. (C) Latortue told Ambassador that he was also concerned that Alexandre would try to usurp the Prime Minister's constitutional powers. In a speech he had given at Latortue's investiture, the President had mentioned that he would "give guidance" to the ministries in the development of their national plans -- a sign, Latortue said, that the President intended to interfere in the government's agenda. More worrisome still would be the President's nominations of Directors General, and a looming battle over control of the budget. In both instances, Latortue said, he would need Ambassador's assistance to make sure that Alexandre did not encroach on the government's prerogatives. (Note: Ambassador will see President Alexandre on this subject later in the week.)

Moving Ahead on the CEP?

9. (C) Latortue told Ambassador that he intended to form the CEP (Provisional Electoral Council) "next week." When Ambassador expressed surprise that Latortue would move so quickly on the elections front, Latortue laughed and replied that the CEP would invariably move slowly to set itself up. "There is so much work to be done," he concluded, it was best to launch the process.

10. (C) Comment. Convergence's acknowledgment, even while in a fit of pique, that Latortue's choices are "of great competence and quality" is telling. In our opinion, Latortue did an admirable job of managing the complex array of actors in this process and mounting a government of experts. While Latortue's choices may deny him a degree of vocal and enthusiastic support from the established "opposition" actors, they bode well for good governance and oversight of a truly neutral, credible electoral process.

FOLEY

=====CABLE ENDS=====